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## **Pre-Registration Information for “Signaling and Public Beliefs about Treaty Compliance”**

### Objective

The goal of the study is to test how signals from international organizations and/or the US government affect US public opinion on human rights issues. The specific topic that it addresses is the use of prolonged solitary confinement in US prisons.

### Hypotheses

We seek to test 5 pairs of hypotheses. Each of these considers the impact of one stimulus (or pair of stimuli) on one of the two dependent variables of most interest to this study—opinions about the desirability of the use of prolonged solitary confinement, and willingness to take action to try to stop the practice.

Hypothesis 1a: Subjects that receive a signal from the national government that a practice does not violate a treaty are less likely to express opposition to the practice as compared with subjects that receive no signal.

Hypothesis 1b: Subjects that receive a signal from the national government that a practice does not violate a treaty are less likely to take action to stop the practice as compared with subjects that receive no signal.

Hypothesis 2a: Subjects that receive a signal from the United Nations that a practice violates a treaty are more likely to express opposition to the practice as compared with subjects that receive no signal.

Hypothesis 2b: Subjects that receive a signal from the United Nations that a practice violates a treaty are more likely to take action to stop the practice as compared with subjects that receive no signal.

Hypothesis 3a: Subjects that receive a signal from international NGOs that a practice violates a treaty are more likely to express opposition to the practice as compared with subjects that receive no signal.

Hypothesis 3b: Subjects that receive a signal from international NGOs that a practice violates a treaty are more likely to take action to stop the practice as compared with subjects that receive no signal.

Hypothesis 4a: Subjects that receive a signal from the United Nations that an action violates a treaty and a signal from the national government that an action does not violate a treaty are more likely to express opposition to the practice as compared with subjects that only receive a signal from the national government that an action does not violate a treaty.

Hypothesis 4b: Subjects that receive a signal from the United Nations that an action violates a treaty and a signal from the national government that an action does not violate a treaty are more likely to take action to stop the practice as compared with subjects that only receive a signal from the national government that an action does not violate a treaty.

Hypothesis 5a: Subjects that receive a signal from international NGOs that an action violates a treaty and a signal from the national government that an action does not violate a treaty are more likely to express opposition to the practice as compared with subjects that only receive a signal from the national government that an action does not violate a treaty.

Hypothesis 5b: Subjects that receive a signal from international NGOs that an action violates a treaty and a signal from the national government that an action does not violate a treaty are more likely to take action to stop the practice as compared with subjects that only receive a signal from the national government that an action does not violate a treaty.

## Method

This study will use an online survey-based experiment. Paid participants (consisting of US-based adults) will be recruited using the survey firm Dynanta. We aim to recruit about 3,000 respondents (500 per treatment arm) for the study.

After giving their consent to participate in the study (please see attached survey text), the respondents will be asked to read a mocked-up newspaper article that describes the practice of prolonged solitary confinement in US prisons. Each respondent will be randomly assigned a variant of the article that differs in terms of the information it provides about the position that the US government, or various international organizations, have taken on the legal and moral implications of the practice. After having read the article, the respondents will be asked questions that measure their support for the practice. They will also be asked to answer questions about their knowledge of international politics as well as some basic demographic information.

## Mocked-up Newspaper Article

The respondent will be asked to read a version of the following mocked-up newspaper article. (This article has been adapted from a story that ran on the PBS news website in 2014.) In the online survey, this will be formatted to look like an article in the online edition a major newspaper.

Shown below is the version of the article that will be shown to respondents who are assigned to the control group:

*Does Long-Term Solitary Confinement Violate International Law?*

*By Peter Hughes, Justice Correspondent*

*July 12, 2019*

*When corrections officials talk about solitary confinement, they describe it as the prison within the prison, and for good reason. For 23 hours a day, inmates are kept inside a cell that is approximately 80 square feet, smaller than a typical horse stable. Cells are furnished with a bed, sink and toilet, but rarely much else. Food is delivered through a slot in the door, and each day inmates are allowed just one hour of exercise.*

*For most of the 20th century, a typical stay in solitary amounted to just a few days, or several weeks in more extreme cases. Today, it's not unusual for inmates to spend years at a time in solitary. Supporters say the practice helps keep prisons safe, but according to the medical literature, solitary confinement can also take a heavy mental toll.*

*Researchers studying the impact of long-term solitary confinement have found that it can lead to hallucinations, panic attacks, paranoia, a loss of impulse control, and hypersensitivity to external stimuli. Some inmates lose the ability to maintain a state of alertness, while others develop crippling obsessions.*

*Legal experts are now weighing in on the question of whether this amounts to torture and needs to be stopped. Some point to the fact that the US has signed on to the Convention Against Torture, an international agreement that defines torture as "any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person."*

Experimental Manipulations

The respondents will be randomly assigned to one of six treatment arms. The treatment determines which (if any) additional paragraphs are appended to the end of the article.

<b>Treatment Arm</b>	<b>Additional text added to the end of the newspaper article:</b>
Group 1: Control	N/A
Group 2: US Govt	However, the US government takes a different view. The US State Department has argued that the use of solitary confinement does

	not inflict the “severe pain or suffering” that would put the US in violation of the its obligations under torture convention.
Group 3: UN	International organizations have strongly criticized the US for its use of long-term solitary confinement, citing both humanitarian and legal concerns. The United Nations has argued that the practice is not only inhumane but puts the US in violation of its obligations under the torture convention.
Group 4: INGOs	International organizations have strongly criticized the US for its use of long-term solitary confinement, citing both humanitarian and legal concerns. Major human rights nonprofits, such as Amnesty International and Physicians for Human Rights, have argued that the practice is not only inhumane but puts the US in violation of its obligations under the torture convention.
Group 5: US Govt + UN	International organizations have strongly criticized the US for its use of long-term solitary confinement, citing both humanitarian and legal concerns. The United Nations has argued that the practice is not only inhumane but puts the US in violation of its obligations under the torture convention.  However, the US government takes a different view. The US State Department has argued that the use of solitary confinement does not inflict the “severe pain or suffering” that would put the US in violation of the its obligations under torture convention.
Group 6: US Govt + INGOs	International organizations have strongly criticized the US for its use of long-term solitary confinement, citing both humanitarian and legal concerns. Major human rights nonprofits, such as Amnesty International and Physicians for Human Rights, have argued that the practice is not only inhumane but puts the US in violation of its obligations under the torture convention.  However, the US government takes a different view. The US State Department has argued that the use of solitary confinement does not inflict the “severe pain or suffering” that would put the US in violation of the its obligations under torture convention.

Measuring the response variables

After having read the article, the respondent will be asked to indicate to what extent they agree or disagree with the following statement:

*The US should STOP using prolonged solitary confinement in its prisons.*

They will indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on a -10 to +10 sliding scale.



The respondents will then be given the chance to elaborate on their responses to these questions using a text-entry box, if they so choose.

In situations where the respondent had indicated that they were in support (or took a neutral position) in response to the earlier question about stopping the use of prolonged solitary confinement, the respondents will then be presented with an additional question that aims to test whether they are willing to take action towards that goal. This consists of asking the respondents the following question:

*Would you be interested in learning about actions you can take to help end the use of prolonged solitary confinement in US prisons? [yes/no]. (If your answer is "yes," we'll direct you to some relevant resources at the end of the survey.)*

#### Follow-up Questions

The respondents will then be asked a series of follow-up questions. These will consist of the following:

1. A set of multiple-choice questions to test whether the reader had paid attention to the key facts in the article.
2. A set of questions to assess the respondent's general level of knowledge of international affairs
3. Questions on political identification and demographics (e.g., gender, race, income, education, geographical region, etc).

The full details of these questions are set out in the attached survey instrument.

#### Analysis

The core hypothesis-testing part of the analysis will involve a series of pairwise comparisons between the mean level of support (or opposition) to the use of prolonged solitary confinement, as well as willingness to take action to stop the practice, across the various treatment groups.

We shall also perform some exploratory analysis that considers how each of the treatments affect the relative weight that the respondents place on each of the factors that are likely to shape their views on the matter (e.g., compliance with international law, humanitarian concerns, etc.)

We shall also explore possible interactions between each of these manipulations and other variables such political ideology, age, education level, and levels of political knowledge.